



A DEADLY DANCE BETWEEN
PREDATOR AND PREY.

HUNTERLORE

THE
HUNTERLAND
SERIES

DANA CLAIRE

PRAISE FOR *HUNTERLAND*

“A wild ride of a paranormal thriller with a will they/won’t they romance that will keep young adult readers turning the pages and wanting more.” —**School Library Journal**

“Liv and Liam’s alternating perspectives construct an intriguing mystery . . . a satisfactory addition to the meta of fast-paced paranormal adventures.” —**Publishers Weekly**

“Give this to your diehard *Supernatural* fans.” —**Booklist**

“Everything I want in a story—Monsters, family, romance, and humor. Don’t hesitate to one-click this one!” —**Wendy Higgins, New York Times bestselling author of The Sweet Evil Trilogy**

“Fans of *Supernatural* will not be disappointed with *Hunterland*. Dana Claire knocked it out of the park.” —**Lynn Rush, New York Times and USA Today bestselling author**

“*Hunterland* delights in every way. Both the intrigue and the romance are deliciously dangerous.” —**Eva Pohler, USA Today bestselling author of The Underworld Saga**

“In *Hunterland*, danger lurks everywhere. This coming of age adventure is filled with murder, mystery, the paranormal, and lots of thrilling twists and turns.” —**Cameo Renae, USA Today bestselling author**

“*Hunterland* is an angsty, action-packed adventure. In Dana Claire’s world every kind of creature is causing trouble, and the possibilities are as fun as they are dangerous.” —**Jennifer Ann Shore, Amazon bestselling author of Perfect Little Flaws**

HUNTERLORE



HUNTERLORE

DANA CLAIRE



CamCat
Books

CamCat Publishing, LLC
Fort Collins, Colorado 80524
camcatpublishing.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

© 2024 by Dana Claire

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address CamCat Publishing, LLC, 1281 East Magnolia Street, #D1032, Fort Collins, CO 80524.

Hardcover ISBN 9780744309683
Paperback ISBN 9780744309775
Large-Print Paperback 9780744309812
eBook ISBN 9780744309799
Audiobook ISBN 9780744309836

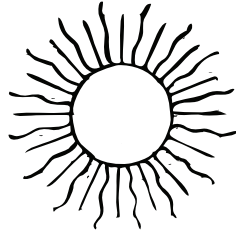
Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data available upon request

Book and cover design by Maryann Appel

*To Katherine Bountry,
whose unwavering belief in this series
has breathed new life into it.
Your passion for Hunterland and Hunterlore
has deeply touched my heart.*

Thank you.





1

OLIVIA

There are terrors in the night that have nothing to do with monsters, and I was determined to become one. But first, apparently, I needed to learn to defend myself.

I shifted my weight on the hard wooden bench we'd pushed against the wall, along with the rest of the furniture, to give Liam and Nikki space to spar in the center of the room. The basement had been meticulously transformed from a storage area into a small gym and studio apartment that played home to our Hunterland learning center, for all things monster related.

"Whoa!" My little sister Pepper covered her mouth, bouncing on the edge of the seat beside me as Liam ducked Nikki's wild punch. Nikki staggered when her fist met air instead of bone but smirked anyway.

Our simple, small-town Wisconsin lives had changed a few months ago when Liam Hunter, his sister, Jacqueline, and their father, Jack Hunter, showed up to investigate a string of suspicious suicides in my high school. Well, there was also that bit about a vampire nest and my mother turning into a vengeful spirit. That had thrown us for an even bigger loop.

While the Hunter family helped sort it all out, Liam discovered my sister and I had some magical abilities of our own, and Pepper and I had been fast-tracked to join them as hunters of things that go bump in the night.

Which brought us here. Doc, Hunterland's appointed leader and our current instructor, thought watching Liam and Nikki fight would make a good introduction to training. But each punch made me wonder if I'd withstand even a few seconds of a battle with either of them, despite my newfound healer abilities. All three of us were seniors in high school, but they felt years older than me, and watching them bob and weave only added to that experience gap.

Liam ducked again, and Nikki snarled as she regained her footing. Even when she missed, she did it with sex appeal, whereas I'd likely resemble a newborn baby deer discovering its legs. Nikki's body language shifted from slinky feline to prowling lioness, and I saw the monster hunter within, brimming with the ferocity I knew I needed to find for myself if I planned to survive this new life I'd stumbled into.

"Wow, look at them go." Pepper elbowed me in the side. "They look good out there."

Or they looked like two ex-lovers trying to show each other up, which for all intents and purposes they were. And of course, right after the twins showed up, Liam started to pull away. Instead of the budding romance I had thought we had started last month, now we felt like strangers passing each other in the halls of our shared living quarters. I asked for time to get to know each other, start with a friendship, with the assumption we'd end up being more. But his response was silence and distance. My ego was too fragile to actually ask what in the hell changed. So here we were, acting as if nothing had happened and the last several months between us meant diddly-squat.

My stomach clenched as Nikki flipped her perfect, lithe body on the exercise mats. Liam wasn't mine, and probably never would be at this point, but seeing the kind of girl he'd chosen in the past made me

want to crawl into an oversized set of sweats and eat ice cream until I puked.

Nikki kicked Liam in the ribs and muttered something that sounded like “Sorry, love” in her annoyingly sexy British accent.

Pepper snorted. Her blue hair flopped over one eye as she leaned in. “That’s gotta hurt.”

I squirmed, unsure if she meant Nikki’s powerful blow to Liam’s kidney or the powerhouse-couple image the pair projected. As Pepper liked to point out every time I made doe eyes in the presence of our lead hunter, I’d been the one to push Liam into the friend zone first, so I had no cause to turn around and throw a jealous fit now that his old girlfriend had shown up.

Still, only a month ago . . . he’d been right there, sleeping next to me every other night, the two of us healing wounds we didn’t want to talk about with anyone else after we’d both lost our mothers in the worst possible ways. But maybe that was why I’d feared letting him in as more than an ally, someone who understood my odd abilities and who related to family trauma caused by the supernatural. If I’d let that relationship continue without a friendship first, I’d have risked Liam’s nomadic, closed-off lifestyle tearing us in two.

The air, already cloyed with sweat, thickened with the heavy scent of melted butter as Jazzy, Nikki’s equally beautiful but less obnoxious twin, plopped next to Pepper on the black painted bench. Her slender fingers were wrapped around a large, red bowl filled with freshly popped popcorn. She motioned for us to help ourselves to the snack.

Pepper dove right into the buttery bowl. Jazzy smiled with bubble-gum pink lips, exposing her bright teeth. She bobbed her chin in the direction of Liam and Nikki. “This is when the two of them are actually fun to be around. Hold on to your knickers, it’s about to get very entertaining. Nikki always says a good spar is just as satisfying as sex.”

I groaned loudly, and Liam looked up at the sound. Nikki took advantage, landing a quick jab to his chiseled jaw. His blue eyes sliced

into me as if it were my fault she'd clipped him. Grimacing, he rounded back on her.

Her lips curled into an impish grin, and she threw her perfect curls over her shoulder. "I'm going easy on you, mate. It's been so long since you've teamed up with real hunters, you seem a tad rusty." She purred—yes, purred—the last few words.

Ugh, what is she even doing here?

Of course, I knew the answer. Her and Jazzy's uncle, Doc—our current houseguest—had asked for their help in training my sister and me. But why couldn't Doc do it himself? I'd thought hunters worked in smaller packs—the lonesome road of a supernatural assassin traveling on society's knife edge. Why had so many congregated in my house? The vampire nest and vengeful spirits that had started this mess were gone.

I didn't have those answers yet. But I couldn't help but feel that with nothing to fight, the Hunterland gang were restless predators—and as a newbie, I was still prey.

Liam sidestepped to the right, evading a roundhouse kick so high, I wondered if Nikki could take flight. Her uncle, who was basically a supercomputer database of monster-hunting knowledge and lore, had mentioned she possessed a supernatural ability. Whatever it was, it probably trumped my power of premonition and status as resident healer. Just one more thing she had that I didn't.

Including Liam Hunter's attention.

Okay, yeah, pity party for one here. I didn't say I was above sulking, did I?

"Are you sure you're taking it easy on me?" Sarcasm soaked Liam's words. "From the way you're panting, I'd guess you're either in heat or out of shape."

Liam's dig didn't faze Nikki's performance. Her leg kicked out and swiped Liam's, sending him to the ground. She drove her fist toward his gut, but Liam rolled and scissored a leg around her neck, pinning her.

Within seconds she tapped out, and not a moment too soon. My throat had dried, and my angst was elevated to gag-reflex level.

Liam extended his hand, and Nikki accepted, rising with his assistance. His full lips were drawn upward. He rarely allowed peeks behind his hardened badass exterior, but when he did, that smile was so beautiful, it landed a gut punch to the heart.

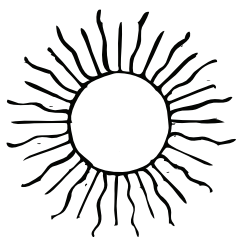
I stood to excuse myself and end the torment, but the thunder of barreling boots on the stairs made me pause.

“Liam.” Doc appeared, his wide-eyed gaze landing on each of us as he descended, fixing upon Liam last. He adjusted the maroon turban that matched his sweater. “There you are. You’re needed. We have a situation.”

My eyes trailed above him to my father, who followed. He stood dressed in full police uniform—odd considering this was his day off.

“What’s going on?” My gaze darted back and forth between Doc and my father.

Dad’s tired eyes found mine beneath lowered lashes. “We have a murder case. A *Hunterland* murder case.”



2

OLIVIA

Liam pulled off his soaked, practically transparent shirt and dabbed his forehead. His well-defined abdominal muscles danced on display as he breathed in and out, curling my stomach. Okay, so I couldn't have him. Didn't mean I couldn't look anymore—even if it wasn't the right time to ogle at all that taut skin, no matter how it glistened, covered in sweat. My undisciplined eyes made me a glutton for punishment.

Liam strode toward my dad with his head held high. "What happened?" His brows scrunched.

"Five bodies turned up in the woods about fifteen miles from here. My boys are calling it an animal attack—limbs missing, torsos torn to shreds."

I shivered, while Dad raked a hand through his dark, newly thinning hair.

Finding out your dead wife ended up a vengeful ghost willing to kill her own family just to stay a spirit could age you quickly.

My father had encountered plenty of death, but supernatural murder took extra getting used to. It was likely why he had asked Doc to act as a live-in Hunterland tutor. And probably why he'd agreed to let Liam

and his sister, Jac, stay when their dad asked. Agent Hunter didn't want to expose them to the hunt for their now-werewolf mother, Veronica Hunter.

"And you think otherwise?" Liam slicked back the wet strands of his dark hair. The muscles in his chest rippled with each movement as a single line of sweat traced along his pecs.

Dad nodded at him, Adam's apple bobbing. "The victims are all missing their . . . their h-hearts." He whisper-choked on the last word and gulped like it was hard to swallow.

I understood. I hadn't fully come to terms with knowing monsters were real either.

"Shape-shifters?" Pepper looked at Doc for confirmation. She'd taken to his hunter lessons over the past month way better than any standard school curriculum. Claws and fangs, human-heart diets, minds possessed by spirits, bodies sucked dry till they were skin and bones, dark legends coming to life. She excelled in those subjects. With him, that punk rebel act dissolved, and she was a regular teacher's pet.

"You'd be right, Poppet." Doc finger-combed his salt-and-pepper beard. "Most likely werewolves, with the full moon last night." He raised a brow at Liam.

Liam hung his T-shirt around his neck, holding onto the ends with his elbows hugged in tight as he paced the room. "Be thankful the body count wasn't higher. Five's nothing." Liam's cool composure had me throwing him a deep frown. I'd learned over the last several months that his style was less coddling and more a quick thwap to the back of the head, or in my case, the heart. In some ways, I appreciated the honesty, but when it came to gore and guts, a little tact would have been nice.

I fidgeted from foot to foot, still struggling to comprehend the reality of yet another mythical creature. "So, they can only shift on full moons, right?" Since dabbling in crystals, energetic vibrations, and spirituality, I had an advanced knowledge of astrology and the effects of the moon, sun, and stars. What I lacked were werewolf facts. We hadn't

technically covered them yet in our studies. Doc's recently wrapped lessons on spirits, occultists, and vampires had already tapped out my mental reserves.

"No, they can shift whenever they want." Jazzy handed Nikki the popcorn bowl and threw her loose brown curls up into a bun, making her look like a tamer, more sophisticated version of her sweaty, still-panting twin. "But they can't control the change under the full moon." Unlike her sister, she'd come to training in a cute top with jeans. The twins were tall—like, model tall. Whereas her cut-off shirt would have met the top of my pants, it barely covered Jazzy's bra. Clearly, she hadn't intended to spar, or a boob might've fallen out. She crossed her legs at the ankles and leaned back, addressing Pepper and me. "Whether they want to or not, when the man in the moon flashes his pearly smile, they have to shift."

Nikki handed the bowl to bright-eyed Pepper, who elaborated: "And the only way they can shift back when the moon is full is by eating a human heart."

Ew. I plopped back onto the bench next to my sister, tucking my legs underneath me. How any of this was possible blew my mind and grossed me out.

"What if they don't?" I asked. My sister filled her mouth with a handful of popcorn, speaking between chews. "Eat a heart, I mean?"

My stomach churned. How could she stuff her face with food while we were discussing chowing down on organs? Pepper had a steel stomach compared to mine, especially when it came to the paranormal.

Nikki shrugged. "Consuming a human heart is the only way for them to become human again. Until then, they stay in their animal form. Too long like that and they'll go crazy, like a rabid dog." The sympathy tingeing her voice surprised me.

"Great. Another unexplainable case to solve." Dad rubbed the back of his neck and turned to Liam. "I'm on my way to the crime scene. I could use your help."

Liam released his T-shirt from around his neck and tucked it into his mesh shorts. He grabbed his hoodie and threw it over his head, threading his arms into the sleeves and pulling down the hem.

“Sounds good. Let me change into jeans and we’ll go. Nikki, you’re on this one with me. Grab your gear.”

Her green eyes sparkled like he’d crowned her homecoming queen. I really wanted to punch that look off her face, but I hardly knew how. And it wasn’t like I could protest Liam’s choice in partner. Really, what could I even say? I’d proved I knew nothing by asking the stupid werewolf question. I’d be a hindrance to the investigation. Sucky, but true.

“I’ll be outside in the cruiser, waiting.” Dad dipped his chin to the rest of us and headed upstairs.

I couldn’t help but notice the heavy hunch to his shoulders the past several days. Monster hunting had taken a toll on him. I still wasn’t sure he had processed our mother’s transformation, let alone our need to destroy her.

“What about the rest of us?” Jazy reached across me to grab another handful of popcorn from the bowl on Pepper’s lap. If they didn’t stop going over me, I was going to smack one of them.

“It’s not necessary for us all to be there.” Liam’s eyes caught mine.

Warmth crept up my neck as a blush heated my cheeks. What he really meant was he didn’t want *me* to be there.

“And we don’t want Sheriff Davis’s officers questioning why he’s bringing teenagers to a closed crime scene,” Liam added for good measure. “Nikki and I will look strange enough. We don’t need an underage convoy.”

“We’ll go after they leave, then.” Jazy grabbed the popcorn back from Pepper, dismissing Liam’s excuse with the same effortlessness she applied to scooping up her next handful. “I thought we were supposed to be training the Davis girls, not sheltering them. How can they learn about our world if we don’t let them in?”

Liam cursed behind his hand, rubbing his face. “It’s not safe.”

Jazzy set the bowl on the floor and crossed her arms. “Nothing we do is safe.” Her expression added an unspoken *duh* at the end. “They aren’t made of glass. What’s wrong with you?” Her lips thinned into a tight line as her eyes pleaded with her uncle to intervene. Doc shook his head, silently declining to get involved.

“She’s not going. She’s not properly trained.” Liam gestured to me with all the authority of a drill sergeant.

I’d just readied a rebuttal when Jazzy speared Liam with a scowl. “Are you serious right now, mate? Are you so afraid for her safety that you won’t even let her use her gifts?”

I tensed, fists clenched at my sides. They were talking like I was invisible. But my protests stuck on my tongue. What would I even say? I wanted to be involved, but going to a crime scene with bloody bodies wasn’t all that appealing.

Having the choice to go? Now that sounded good. I’d much rather say no than be told I couldn’t do something. I guessed in that way Pepper and I were alike.

Instead of answering Jazzy, Liam pivoted, heading to the stairs. I gaped at his back. Nikki breathed down his neck as she followed. She had watched the whole exchange in smug silence, probably pleased to have him all to herself on the mission.

“Liam Noah Hunter,” Jazzy said, her syrupy sweet voice going hard as rock candy. “Do you want me to use my ability right now? Maybe that’s how we can start training the girls, since you won’t let them witness a crime scene. The fact you haven’t allowed it speaks volumes. You’re unfocused, and I am done waiting for you to wake up.”

Jac, Doc, and Nikki all sucked in a breath. Pepper and I exchanged confused glances.

Liam spun around, his jaw twitching. He dropped his voice low. “You touch Olivia, and you’ll have me to deal with.”

Touch me? Sweat dampened my armpits. Suddenly, I wanted to be anywhere else but in that room. What was Jazzy’s ability?

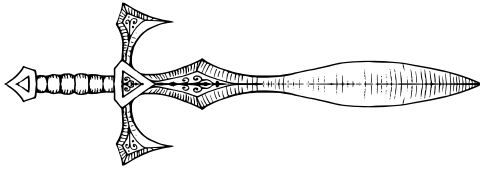
A roguish glint appeared in Jazzy's emerald eyes. "You don't scare me, mate." She stepped toward me, and I retreated. "Trust me." Her gaze softened, her eyes pleading with me to have faith in her.

"Olivia, don't." Liam's voice gave me pause. I was tired of his safeguarding. I deserved to be every bit a part of Hunterland as everyone else in this room, and I'd prove it. I steadied my legs, locking out my knees, and sucked in a breath.

Jazzy moved closer and I held my ground. She reached out and clutched my elbow. Her mouth moved, softly whispered words I couldn't understand escaping. Something in Latin, maybe. Heat permeated my veins like molten lava, and I screamed as if I'd really gone up in flames. Spots dotted my vision, until a burst of light morphed into colors and images.

I'd trusted Jazzy. She'd seemed nice. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe she was just as conniving as her sister. Maybe I'd put faith into the wrong hunter.

An earthy scent rife with stimulating pheromones enveloped me right before darkness crept in on both sides.



3

LIAM

Olivia's eyes fluttered shut, and her legs gave out. I dove as she crumbled, catching her head two inches from the ground. Soft puffs of air expelled from her parted lips. I glared up at Jazzy. She sported a "told you I would" smirk, her hands in the air in mock surrender.

How could she do this to Olivia? She was new to Hunterland, to hunters, to lore, to abilities. It was one thing to warn her monsters existed everywhere in this world, but it was a whole other thing to expose her to the people who hid in the shadows, killing the supernatural legends. We were our own type of horror. Jazzy had given Olivia no time to prepare, no time to understand, no explanation. I hated to imagine the spike of fear brought on by Jazzy's sudden spell. Olivia was probably still scared as hell, wherever she'd gone inside her head. *Dammit!*

"I will not forget this," I growled. One arm under Olivia's neck and the other under her knees, I carried her to the couch, setting her in my lap and cupping her face. "Olivia, can you hear me?" My thumb brushed across her warm cheek, our first touch in weeks. "Olivia, wake up."

My gaze traced her features. I couldn't deny it—Olivia was beautiful. Subtle, delicate features that didn't need makeup to enhance, with

hazel eyes that tightened your chest and a smile that stopped the world from turning. Too good for a guy like me.

Olivia blinked several times and then jolted as if startled to see me. She sucked in a deep breath and rubbed her eyes. "I . . . I had another vision." Her groggy voice sounded far away.

Some people called Olivia's kind seers, but in Hunterland we called it the power of premonition. Those with the ability helped level the playing field against the monsters.

"Yeah, I know." I sighed. "It's okay. It's Jazzy's ability. She's what we call an amp." I kept my voice steady to assuage Olivia's confusion. But once she got her bearings, I'd let Jazzy have it for inducing a prediction without proper warning. What was she thinking?

"What the hell is an amp?" Pepper said as she took a seat next to us. She placed her hand on Olivia's leg and gave a supportive squeeze. In the last couple of weeks, I'd witnessed a change in the Davis sisters' dynamic. Pepper didn't pick fights as much, and every once in a while she'd show real sisterly support.

Olivia pushed herself upright but didn't move off me. Not that I'd let her. Call it selfish, but I was using this moment to be close to her, and I wasn't ready to let go. Her hands rested on her thighs as she searched our faces for the answer.

"What did you see?" Doc asked. I had forgotten he was even there. Clearly, his niece's irresponsible actions hadn't upset him enough to scold her. I searched the room for someone who agreed with me, but when my eyes landed on Nikki, she had fixed her disapproving scowl on me, not her sister. Anyone who observed the way Nikki pursed her lips in Olivia's direction might believe she was jealous, but I knew better. She was scared. Scared that my leadership abilities had become impeded by a reason she deemed unworthy.

"I'm not sure what I saw exactly. It was an empty log cabin. Well, empty of people anyway." Olivia squinted. "This is going to sound weird."

I rubbed soothing circles on her back. “Go ahead. Nothing will sound out of the ordinary to us.” I offered her a small smile. “Monster hunters, remember?”

In the last couple weeks, Olivia and I hadn’t exchanged many words, simply because I didn’t know which ones to use. She asked for friendship, to take things slowly.

I would have been fine with that. But then the twins showed up and reality crashed down, muddying my feelings. Their presence was a fierce reminder of my future, one lacking a home or stability. Instead of facing the reality, I chose to ignore it and Olivia.

So, when the girl I’d fallen for leaned into my side and accepted my warmth, the minute release of tension was a welcome change from the ice-cold temperatures between us. Like I said, I wasn’t ready to end the moment.

Olivia looked at the ceiling. “It had to be a kitchen because there was an island, a stove, and a fridge but no furniture except one chair in the middle of an open space. Someone had coiled up a thick rope next to its legs, beside a roll of duct tape. The chair legs looked cemented into the ground.” She bit her lower lip, leaving a tempting fine gloss along its curve.

What I wouldn’t give to kiss her again.

“I don’t know how, though. The curtains were partially drawn, so I could only see slivers of the room well.” She paused. “There was an overhead light above the seat, though, dangling like they do in interrogation rooms in movies.” She laughed nervously.

“Sounds like a good time,” Nikki snarked. I ignored her and glanced up at Doc. Olivia’s visions had proven extremely accurate when it came to settings.

He dipped his chin, a silent indication he had been thinking the same thing. “Let’s get you to work on a sketch, Poppet. Maybe we can decipher the place better that way. Your visions of landscapes and locations are normally spot on, and if Jazzy better prepares you for her amp

powers”—he shot Jazzy a pointed glare, *finally*—“you’ll be able to hone your ability. We’ll try again tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Olivia said, her hesitation evident.

I tucked a loose strand of Olivia’s brown hair behind her ear and cupped her neck. “Are you okay? You’re not hurt, right?”

She shook her head and seemed to regret it, fingertips moving to her temple. “I’m fine, just a little woozy.” She paused, her gaze traveling to mine, then continued: “Thank you for catching me.” The smile that graced her lips didn’t extend to her eyes, but I’d take it. I knew we’d have to talk eventually, but I wasn’t ready, so I did what I did best: held on to ignorance and flouted any other feelings along with Olivia.

Doc clapped his hands. “Okay, everyone, let’s get ready. We are all going to the crime scene.”

“The hell we are,” I snapped.

“Liam, a word.” Doc motioned for the others to get moving. “We will meet you upstairs.”

Olivia slipped off my lap. The loss of her touch immediately chilled me. No matter my fumbling indecision, this girl had invaded my heart, and I couldn’t get rid of her.

I wanted us to be together, but I’d realized that with me, Olivia would forever be in harm’s way, and I wasn’t about to be the reason she died. The horror of my mom’s tragic end had kept me awake at night for years.

Still did, if I was being honest. I wasn’t about to add to that dread. Nor would I be the reason I lost another woman I cared for.

The girls headed toward the stairs, Pepper excitedly talking about Jazzy’s powers and wanting to learn more.

Once Doc and I were alone, he removed his reading glasses and placed them on the mahogany desk tucked against the righthand wall of the small gym. He leaned his hip against the edge. “William, I know you care about Olivia, but your eagerness to safeguard her is exactly what will get her killed.”

“Excuse me?” I had thought he’d wanted to talk about the hunt, but this was about me? *My* conduct?

Doc remained calm. “I’ve never seen you like this.” He exhaled. “And as your closest thing to an uncle, I’m thrilled you found someone.” I attempted to object, but he held his finger up. “But you cannot protect her and be a supernatural hunter at the same time. It puts the lives of the humans you’re tasked with saving in jeopardy.”

Without thinking, I snapped back, “She doesn’t belong in our world.” My hands curled at my sides.

Doc shook his head like a disappointed parent. “If that were true, she wouldn’t have abilities. She not only belongs in our world, but she’s needed in it as well. If you can’t help her, then stay away from her. You’ll only hinder her growth.”

I barely heard him over the thudding in my ears. Did they all think *I* was the one putting her in danger?

Anger festered in my gut. “What are you going to do about it?” I crossed my arms, challenging him. Did I sound like a child? Sure. Did I care?

Hell no. Olivia’s safety was all that mattered.

Doc’s demeanor remained intact, but his tone turned authoritative. “Send you back to London. We could use a representative at the Hunterland Library to help Elizabeth.”

Beth was Doc’s sister, Jazzy and Nikki’s mum. At first, she’d planned to accompany the twins to Wisconsin, but since Doc had left, she’d remained our only representative at Hunterland’s research center. It functioned as an open meeting place, sometimes even refuge, for our online community.

“It’s your choice on how you handle things from here. You can either be the one to guide the Davis sisters to greatness or be the reason they fail.

My jaw ached from clamping my teeth on my last thread of control. “You may run Hunterland’s resources, but with Dad gone, I run the

hunts. You don't have the authority. You want everyone on this one? Fine. But just remember, in the future, it's my call."

With that, I left him and my fury behind.

As soon as my sister, Jac, got back from the store, the six of us piled into the Bronco while Doc rode in the sheriff's police car. Nikki jumped in the front seat like old times. Jac shook her head while Olivia's jaw developed a twitch. Navigating Nikki and the rest of our crew could be a full-time job on top of my own inner turmoil. *This should be fun.*

Olivia, Jazzy, and Pepper slid into the backseat, while my sister sat among our weapons in what Dad called a jump seat near the trunk door. It looked like the ones designated for flight attendants in airplanes. It had come in handy more than once. The thought of him immediately made my heart sink.

He'd left on his own hunt—to kill our mother turned monster. When he inevitably found her, she'd be dead and this time it would be final. I didn't blame him. I just wished he didn't have to go at it alone. My mother had abandoned us the second she didn't end her own life, trading in her humanity for the enemy.

I gulped, pushing the ache down deep inside. I couldn't handle abandonment and betrayal issues joining all my other stresses. My reopened wounds would have to wait.

Pepper leaned into the gap between the two front seats, resting her forearms on the center console. "So, tell me more about werewolves. Can we identify them when they're human?"

I pulled into the right lane, following Sheriff Davis's cruiser. "Their bodies run hot. They have intense strength and speed. Loud noises hurt their ears. And when angered their eyes will shift, sometimes their teeth and claws too." I slowed as we turned off the highway and pulled onto backroads, approaching the site. "But other than that, it's not that easy

to tell an unshifted werewolf from another human. They aren't like drooling vampires who can't venture out during the day."

Nikki twisted in her seat. "You can always try and get them to touch silver if you're suspicious. It'll burn them. And it's kinda fun when they squeal." Her smile bled into her voice. Nikki was one of the best hunters I knew, but somewhat twisted. Because of the way she'd lost her father, she enjoyed killing monsters a little too much.

"No way. That is so—"

"What the hell is that?" Nikki yanked Pepper's arm forward and thrust it into my line of sight. "Liam, are you serious?"

I clenched my jaw. I didn't need to see the watch to know what she was squawking about. Last month, after a crazy vamp tried to run Pepper over in the school parking lot, I'd made Jac give Olivia and Pepper a set of the heart-rate-tracking and GPS watches our family wore to keep tabs on one another. Giving them to anyone other than Jac, Dad, and me went against our family code, and Nikki knew it.

"You never gave us watches!" Nikki shouted, throwing Pepper's arm backward with more force than necessary. Pepper landed hard in the middle seat with a small yelp.

"Hey, watch yourself." Olivia lunged over the center console, using my headrest for leverage. "I don't care how tough you are. Don't manhandle my sister. She didn't do anything to you."

My lips twitched, fighting back a smile. Olivia might appear mousy, but mess with her sister and she'd bare her tiger teeth in the face of any danger, including a British badass.

Nikki didn't even register Olivia's threat. She'd just noticed Olivia's wrist. "You have one, too?" Nikki glared a hole in my cheek. "Wow, never thought I'd see the day." She let out a low whistle, then slammed her back against the seat, arms crossed.

"Shut up, Nikki." My hands tightened around the wheel. Sure, commissioning those watches screamed "I care about the Davis sisters," maybe a little too much, but that was my business, not Nikki's.

“You won’t let her come on hunts, you’re paranoid about her safety, and you gave her a tracking watch. You’ve either gone entirely soft, mate, or you’ve lost your damn mind.” She tossed a thumb at the backseat. “But whatever it is, get over it. We don’t live lives that allow for this . . .”

I glared at her, daring her to finish that sentence.

She scowled right back, daring me to say she was wrong. “Just get over it already! We don’t have that luxury.” She turned to stare out the window, closing herself off from the rest of the car.

No one said another word, and when we parked at the crime scene, everyone clambered out of the vehicle as if their pants were full of fire ants.

Sheriff Davis waved from the ditch beside the road. “It’s over here. I had the other officers clear the area. There’s just two of my most trusted down there. We’ll have to move the bodies soon. The coroner’s already on the way.” Sheriff Davis motioned for us to follow him into the nearby thickets.

I pushed my shoulders back and followed the Sheriff and Doc through a narrow opening in the trees. The deer path was a mere sliver of a trail, only slightly expanded by the sporadic human traffic it had endured throughout the day. The compacted dirt beneath our feet bore the imprints of previous travelers, their footfalls leaving a faint mark of passage. We ducked under branches, climbed over fallen trees, and looked out for random roots.

“Watch your step.” I turned around to the girls and pointed to the fallen brush in our path.

The girls all wore scowls. Only Pepper seemed unaffected by my various alleged offenses over the past hour. I ground my teeth and silently wished for a solo hunt.

All around us, small creatures stirred and scattered. The leaves crackled under their feet as they scuttled away. Light shifted between the thick branches, casting shadows in our path.

“It’s a couple yards that way.” Sheriff Davis indicated to the right. I could already see a crimson lacquer seeping across the ground and the mangled limbs of the dead.

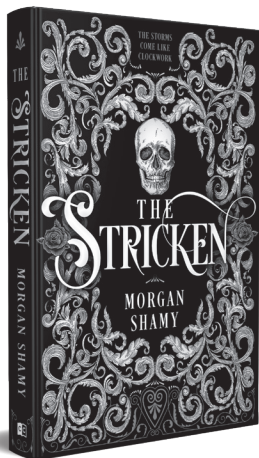
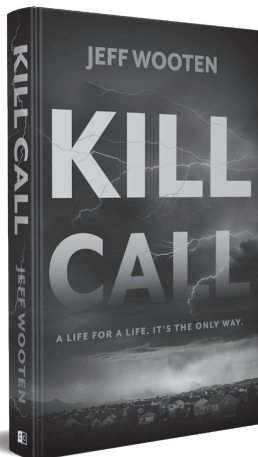
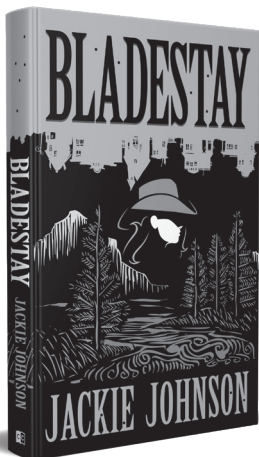
Just then, the trees swayed, and in the distance, I saw a flash of dark gray. I shot my arm out, stopping the girls in their tracks. Putting a finger to my lips to shush them, I closed my eyes and concentrated. One of the benefits of being Hunterland’s founding family was access to a serum coded to our DNA, gifted to my family generations ago by one of the first occultists. When injected into our bloodstream, it heightened our awareness, including our sense of hearing. I was no vampire, but I’d give any bat using echolocation a run for its money.

I sucked in a breath and concentrated. Nails clawing against bark. Hissing. Growling. Five hundred feet southeast, give or take a yard.

I opened my eyes and pulled my handgun from its holster at the small of my back. This was it. The one reason I didn’t want untrained hunters on the case. Werewolves. Now it was my responsibility to keep the girls alive or we’d all end up like the five bodies robbed of their hearts.



MORE HEART-WRENCHING READS FROM CAMCAT BOOKS



Available now, wherever books are sold.





CamCat Books

VISIT US ONLINE FOR MORE BOOKS TO LIVE IN:
CAMCATBOOKS.COM



SIGN UP FOR CAMCAT'S FICTION NEWSLETTER FOR
COVER REVEALS, EBOOK DEALS, AND MORE EXCLUSIVE CONTENT.



CamCatBooks



@CamCatBooks



@CamCat_Books



@CamCatBooks

SILVER BULLETS AREN'T ENOUGH TO PROTECT YOUR HEART.

For Liam Hunter, monster hunting is a way of life—a family tradition passed down for generations. But when campers are murdered in the woods, their hearts ripped from their chests, Liam finds himself facing his most terrifying adversary yet—his own mother, turned monster. Her pack of werewolves will test Liam's limits, his morals, and his connection with the girl who still has too large a claim on his heart.

Olivia Davis is determined to uncover her own place in Hunterland and hone her newfound abilities. But when Olivia has a terrifying vision, she's faced with a much larger uncertainty: her feelings for the boy she let slip through her fingers.

Together, Olivia and Liam must survive the deadly game of cat and mouse, or else risk becoming victims in a world where the monsters are the hunters. The clock is ticking. The game is on. And the price of failure may be their humanity.



CamCat
Books

Cover Design: Maryann Appel

Cover Artwork: Den-Belitsky, Paseven, Pialhovic, Ra2

Young Adult Fantasy

USD\$16.99 CAD\$22.99 GBP£13.99

ISBN 978-0-7443-0977-5

90000



9 780744 309775

BE THE FIRST TO HEAR about new CamCat titles, author events, and exclusive content! Sign up at camcatbooks.com for the CamCat Publishing newsletter.